



Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Pinedale Region

January 2018 Newsletter



A doe is brought in for processing

Wyoming Range Deer Project

The Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit and Wyoming Game and Fish Department, along with many other volunteers, conducted another mule deer capture in the LaBarge area. The research was initiated during the winter of 2012-2013. The overarching goal of the project is to investigate the nutritional relationships between mule deer populations, energy development, habitat conditions, and climate.

The first helicopter capture occurred in March 2013 with the capture of 70 adult females, 35 in the northern (Big Piney / La Barge) and 35 in the southern (Kemmerer / Evanston) winter ranges. Each deer has been fitted with a GPS collar to be worn for two years. Ultrasonography is also performed at each capture to determine percent body fat and pregnancy. Animals are recaptured each December and March to evaluate change in body condition between seasons.

Additionally, the deer are monitored each autumn to determine fawn production and survival. Productivity of individual animals combined with their body condition and forage production data will be used to determine the habitat's "nutritional carrying capacity." Ultimately, this information will allow wildlife managers to assess whether the Wyoming Range deer herd is reaching its reproductive capacity based on current available habitat. This research addresses primary components outlined in the WY Range Mule Deer Initiative.



Wyoming Game and Fish Commissioner Mike Schmid (Left) releases a doe mule deer after processing.



Dr. Kevin Monteith uses an ultrasound to measure body fat on a doe mule deer.



A newly-collared doe is released by Dr. Kevin Monteith and South Jackson Wildlife Biologist Gary Fralick (Front) near LaBarge.



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Sublette Mule Deer Initiative

Pinedale Wildlife Biologist Dean Clause, along with other regional personnel and researchers, conducted the annual Mule Deer Initiative public meeting on January 17 in Pinedale. Clause and others presented the most recent data gathered on the Sublette Mule Deer Herd. The recently completed annual post-hunt season deer survey for the Sublette herd reflected last year's hard winter. The number of fawns was as low as it has been in many years at approximately 49 fawns per 100 does. The buck ratios stayed decent at 34 bucks per 100 does. Managers do not attempt to make a population estimate based on the total number of deer counted during the survey as it is just a sizeable sample, but the number of deer seen does tend to give a picture of the population trend. This year a total of 6,531 deer were counted in the Sublette Herd, which was a 39% decline from the sample of 10,640 counted in 2016. This gives an idea of the number of deer that were lost in last year's hard winter. Wildlife managers are likely to again propose conservative hunting seasons, but what the herd really needs to bounce back is consecutive years of mild winters and high fawn survival. The Game and Fish will be holding public meetings in local communities in January to update the public with the latest numbers, habitat conditions and research being conducted in both the Sublette and Wyoming Range herds.



Mule deer on winter range near Pinedale recently.
Photo by Jordan Kraft

Two Dead Bucks on Winter Range

South Pinedale Game Warden Jordan Kraft followed up on two separate reports of dead buck mule deer on the winter range. Upon further inspection, each was determined to have died from a puncture wound likely suffered while sparring with another buck (photos at Right).

Game and Fish officials are still seeking information on a buck mule deer that was illegally shot northeast of Buckskin Crossing, off of the Lander Cut-Off Road (CR 23-132) near Long Draw. It is believed the deer was likely killed November 9 or 10. The buck deer was shot during a closed season and only the antlers were removed from the animal.

Anyone with possible information regarding this second poaching incident, or who was in the area and may have noted suspicious vehicles or activities, is encouraged to call the Pinedale Game and Fish office at 1-800-452-9107, the STOP POACHING hotline at 877-WGFD-TIP (1-877-943-3847) or the South Pinedale Game Warden, Jordan Kraft, at 307-367-2470.

Callers may remain anonymous and any information leading to an arrest and conviction may result in a reward of up to \$5,000.00.





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The Results are in!

It's no secret that our mule deer, and other big game herds are greatly affected by the quantity and quality of forage available to them on the landscape. This is why Wyoming Game and Fish habitat biologists spend most of their time applying treatments to improve shrubs while also measuring the productivity of these shrubs important to mule deer.

Generally, the amount of new growth on shrubs, or production, is tied to the amount of precipitation received during the growing season (typically April through June) However, this past growing season appears to have been an exception to this rule as early summer precipitation was down, yet excellent growth was recorded for true mountain mahogany, actually increasing from the previous year (Figure 1). The significant snowpack from last winter created a moisture reserve that plants were able to tap into well into the growing season, offsetting a relatively dry spring.



Leader production in 2017 for True Mountain Mahogany increased from an average of 4.14 inches in 2016 to 5.13 inches across the five transects that were monitored (Figure 2). The Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) continued to monitor other shrub species within habitat treatments, documenting in some cases a four-fold increase of production in treated areas versus untreated areas (Three Buttes Dixie Harrow, 2014), with many at least doubling in production two years after treatment.

When applying treatments in shrub communities, the WGFD is looking to not only increase the production of plants, but also increase the age diversity by creating conditions favorable for establishing younger shrubs. This ensures the long-term viability of these plant communities, which in turn will help deer populations through the tough winters and help them produce healthy fawns.

Figure 1.

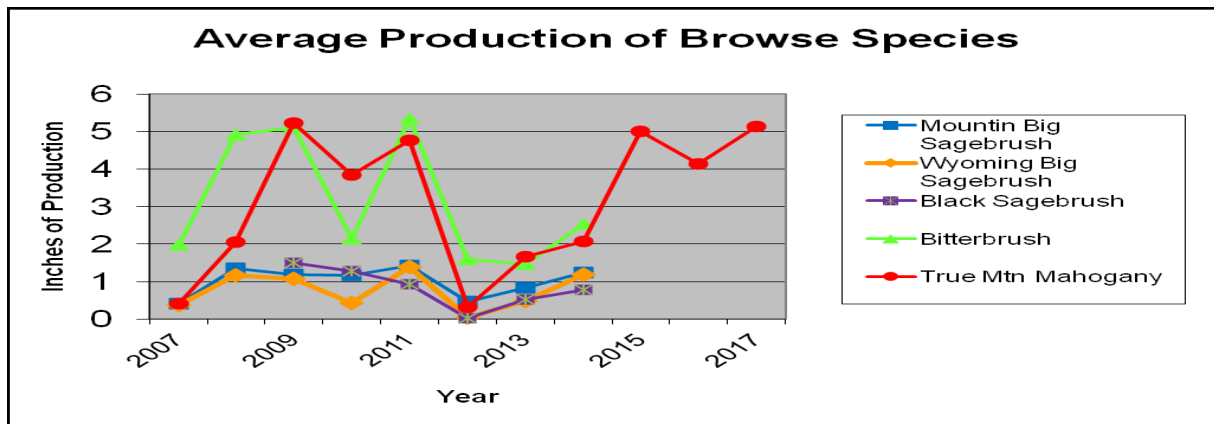
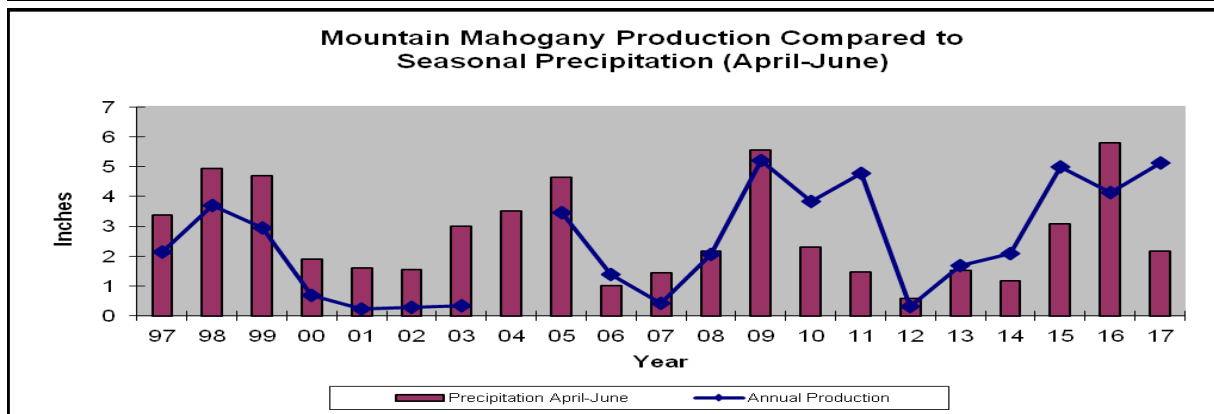


Figure 2.





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From the Front Desk

Pinedale Game and Fish office managers Lori Johnson and Kristen Draney would like to encourage everyone to be cautious with the variable ice conditions on area lakes.

FIVE ICE TIPS

1. CHECK THICKNESS

Contact a local bait shop or sporting goods store to ask about ice conditions and then check once you get there. The rough guidelines for clear, new solid ice are:

- 2 inches – Stay off
- 4 inches – OK for ice fishing or other activities on foot
- Check the thickness of the ice every 100 to 150 feet.
- Never take any vehicles, snowmobiles or ATVs onto the ice.

2. BE SURE IT'S SAFE

- Avoid pressure ridges in the ice and large cracks that can emerge in a lake
- Clear ice is stronger than white ice, which has frozen, thawed and refrozen and is not always stable
- White ice can also be from air bubbles or frozen snow and is much weaker than clear ice. For white ice, double the recommended thickness.

3. REMEMBER

No matter your preparation and ice conditions, ice should never be considered 100 percent safe. Be prepared and cautious at all times.

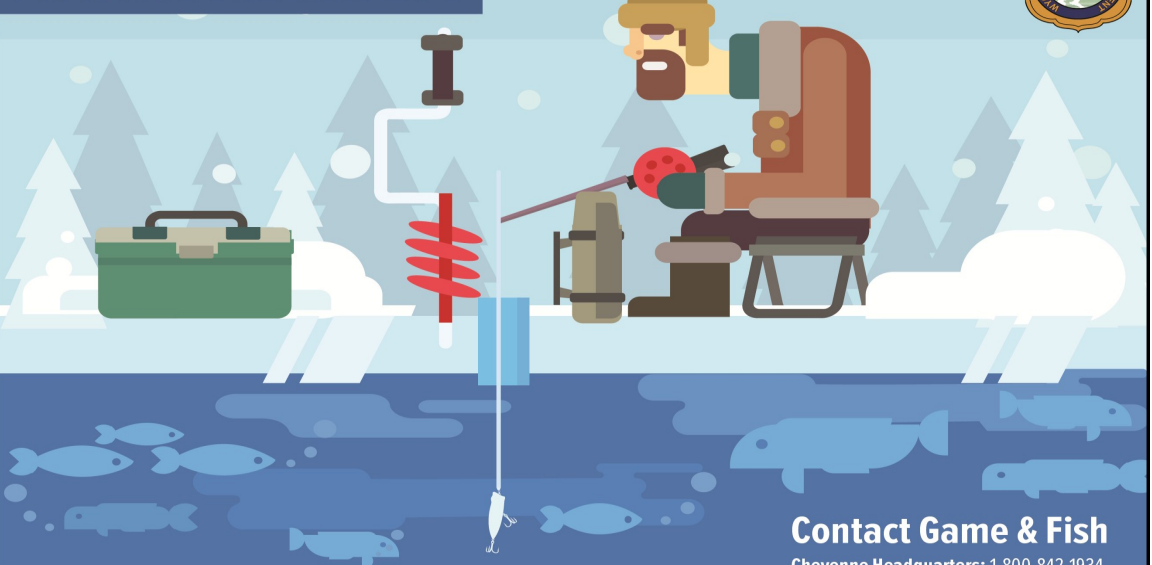
4. BUDDY SYSTEM

Anglers should never fish alone. Always fish with someone else and be certain to let a friend know where you are going.

5. STAY WARM

To prevent hypothermia if an ice fishing accident does occur, pack an extra set of clothes and hot liquids.

PRACTICE ICE SAFETY



What else should I know?

Fluctuating water levels in reservoirs and wind impact ice conditions and can create dangerous ice conditions. Be aware of recent weather conditions and temperatures and scout out the lake you wish to fish for overflow, wet areas, and open water. With variable ice conditions across the state and rapidly changing conditions, anglers are urged to call their regional office to inquire about ice conditions.

Game and Fish discourages driving any motorized vehicle on a frozen lake as well as ice fishing on rivers and on other

moving water that has frozen over. Remember to wear a lifejacket or personal flotation device and carry ice safety picks. Ice cleats are also a good idea. Keep a throw rope handy in case someone falls in.

Anglers venturing on fishing trips this winter should also keep in mind the Fishing Regulations and the Special Winter Ice Fishing Provisions, available on the Game and Fish website at wgfd.wyo.gov, regional offices and Cheyenne Headquarters.

Contact Game & Fish

Cheyenne Headquarters: 1-800-842-1934

Casper Regional Office: 1-800-233-8544

Cody Regional Office: 1-800-654-1178

Green River Regional Office: 1-800-843-8096

Jackson Regional Office: 1-800-423-4113

Lander Regional Office: 1-800-654-7862

Laramie Regional Office: 1-800-843-2352

Pinedale Regional Office: 1-800-452-9107

Sheridan Regional Office: 1-800-331-9834



Deer With Lights

South Pinedale Game Warden Jordan Kraft and Brucellosis-Feedground-Habitat Biologist Becky Fuda (Left) responded to a call of a buck mule deer with Christmas lights stuck on its antlers. The deer was temporarily tranquilized to remove the lights and released unharmed.



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Burbot Study Continues

Pinedale Fish Biologist Darren Rhea continues to assist Tucker Brauer, a graduate student from the University of Idaho, with his burbot research project. Darren flew and tracked fish using the Green River (Right). He found 13 Burbot, 10 were originally captured, tagged and released in Fontenelle reservoir (Below). Most of the Burbot appeared to be concentrated in an area just upstream of the reservoir.



Water for Wildlife

The Pinedale Game and Fish Habitat & Access crew Installed wildlife friendly steel pipe fence to create a livestock exclosure at a water well on BLM land approximately one mile west of the outlet to Boulder Lake. It is a well that was developed for livestock with a solar pumping conversion from a windmill for removal of a sage grouse predator perch. It feeds two large tire tanks on site for livestock and has an additional outflow for providing separate, ground-level water directly for wildlife and for growing wetland vegetation. The exclosure will keep livestock out, but is still constructed to be permeable to wildlife. The Habitat & Access crew did a similar exclosure last year to protect a natural spring source from livestock use. The Game and Fish hopes to due similar projects to create water for both wildlife and livestock in the future.

Aaron Moorehead welds on the Boulder well exclosure fence.

